

GUN VIOLENCE



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GUN VIOLENCE

BACKGROUND

Like cities across the country, Hartford experienced a sharp increase in shooting incidents, including both homicides and non-fatal shootings, in 2020 and 2021. As of December 28, 2023, the number of shooting victims had declined by approximately 28% compared to the same point in 2022, and by approximately 31% compared to the same point in 2019, prior to the pandemic. Indeed, the number of non-fatal shooting victims at this time in 2023 is lower than any year since at least 2006, and the total number of shooting incidents is the second lowest during that period.

Incidents of fatal gun violence have remained high, with 27 gun violence homicides this year. That number is significantly lower than the number of gun violence homicides in 2022, but remains higher than many prior years, even as the total number of gun violence incidents has decreased significantly. The larger share of gun violence incidents resulting in fatalities appears to be a result of multiple factors, including a) the increasing prevalence of high-capacity magazines and “switches” that convert semi-automatic weapons to fully automatic, increasing lethality, and b) an increasing share of personal, intimate acts of violence at close quarters.

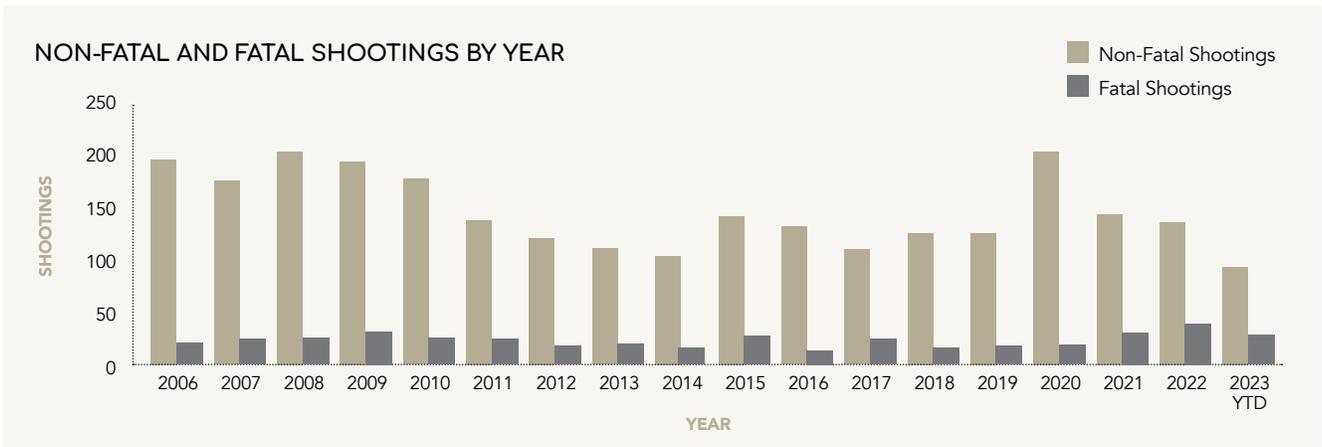
In 2021, the Hartford Police Department commissioned a thorough analysis of homicides and shootings in the city. There were several important findings:

- Gun violence disproportionately affects males between 18-34.
- The most intense concentration of gun violence occurs in four neighborhoods: Northeast, South Green, Upper Albany, and Clay Arsenal.

BACKGROUND CONT.

- Gun violence in Hartford is heavily driven by drug-related disputes, personal grudges, and momentary disagreements that turn violent thanks to the presence of firearms.
- Between 64-70% of known victims and suspects in shootings were known to the criminal justice system prior to their involvement in these incidents. The average number of prior arrests was 9.6. A significant number of shooting suspects were on pre-trial release, probation, or parole at the time of the most recent shooting.

Both prior to the pandemic-related increase in gun violence and since, the City of Hartford has undertaken a number of initiatives to address gun violence, emphasizing prevention, intervention, community partnerships, and law enforcement, making aggressive use of all available resources. This memo details a number of those initiatives, and outlines both opportunities and challenges the city will face in the years ahead.



ONGOING INITIATIVES: LAW ENFORCEMENT

No single intervention can eliminate gun violence, but smart law enforcement strategies that seek to deter violent crime and hold perpetrators of crime accountable are an essential part of the solution. The Hartford Police Department continues to implement a number of initiatives that are directly focused on gun violence, in several categories:

STRENGTHENING INTERNAL & EXTERNAL COORDINATION

CREATING A NON-FATAL SHOOTING TASK FORCE:

Research shows that focusing on non-fatal shootings can help reduce overall violence, and in 2021, the Hartford Police Department created a Non-fatal Shooting Response Team (SRT) to bring new resources and an enhanced focus to the problem. The SRT benefited from intensive training, dedicated investigative effort, standardized response protocols, and collaborative peer case review. When a shooting happens, the SRT deploys detectives rapidly to crime scenes and utilizes enhanced investigative training and other assets more often associated with homicide investigations. Since the establishment of the Non-fatal Shooting Response Team, the Department has dramatically increased the clearance rate for non-fatal shootings — doubling the clearance rate from 2020 to 2021 and 2022. Based on that success, in 2022, the U.S. Department of Justice awarded Hartford a \$500,000 grant to continue and expand the SRT's work.

ENHANCED SUPPORT FROM STATE AND FEDERAL

PARTNERS: The Police Department has added to its investigative capacity by strengthening partnerships and increasing the number of state and federal agents assigned to HPD task forces. That includes eight task force officers from the FBI, two from the DEA, two U.S. Marshals, two members of the Connecticut State Police, and intelligence analysts from the Department of Correction and the Connecticut National Guard. Those additional assets do not include the Greater Hartford Regional Auto Task Force, which includes 12 regional police departments and sometimes pursues cases with a connection to shots-fired incidents or shootings.

CLOSER COORDINATION WITH PROSECUTORS' OFFICES:

On a regular basis, the Police Department meets with federal prosecutors and the Office of the Chief State's Attorney. Relying on intelligence gathered from a variety of investigative units, the group identifies individuals at highest risk for violent offending. They work together to determine potential tactics to prevent violent activity by that small group of actors, including federal case adoption and leveraging resources from probation and/or parole. This close coordination increases the likelihood that high-risk offenders are deterred from violent activity.

FOCUSING ON FIREARM SEIZURES: While the Police Department cannot control the flow of guns into the city, it has prioritized seizing illegally possessed guns to get firearms off the streets. As a result of that prioritization, HPD has taken more illegal guns off the street in recent years than ever before. From 2014 through 2020, the Department saw a modest increase in illegal firearms seized each year until 2020, averaging 244 per year, with a high of 272 in 2019. In 2021 and 2022, that figure was 341 and 367 respectively, and as of December 2023, the Department had removed a record 369 illegal firearms from Hartford streets.

RECORD ILLEGAL
FIREARMS REMOVED → 369
AS OF DEC. 2023

LEVERAGING RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY

GUN VIOLENCE PROBLEM ANALYSIS: As referenced earlier, in 2021 the Hartford Police Department engaged an outside expert, Dr. Lisa Barao from Westfield State University, to conduct a thorough examination of the gun violence in Hartford. Working with the Police Department since then, she has produced detailed analyses about the nature of gun violence, the backgrounds of perpetrators and victims, and recommendations for violence reduction based on those observations. The Police Department has the analysis and continues to work with Dr. Barao.

- **Findings:** The analysis examined all homicides and non-fatal shootings from 2018 through 2021 and made a number of findings. The largest categories of non-fatal shootings and homicides were drug-related disputes or personal disputes, collectively making up a majority of homicides and a strong plurality of non-fatal shootings. The vast majority of victims and suspects are males between 18–24, and the vast majority are also known to the criminal justice system.

The analysis also included initial recommendations, many of which the Police Department has pursued, including enhanced focus on very-high-risk people and places, prioritizing enforcement of certain offenses associated with violent crime, strengthening criminal justice partnerships, and leveraging technology, data, and reporting.

SHOTSPOTTER EXPANSION: Hartford utilizes ShotSpotter technology, which is an acoustic sensor system that detects gunfire and alerts the police to its exact location with high precision. In recent years, Hartford has significantly expanded ShotSpotter coverage throughout the city. ShotSpotter now covers all residential neighborhoods in the city, identifying shots-fired incidents that may previously have gone unreported and allowing the police department to respond as quickly as possible to shooting incidents.

- **Funding:** ShotSpotter is an annual subscription service that costs approximately \$740,000 at its current level of deployment. The City does not own the equipment or perform any maintenance. A small portion of the annual cost for the next two years is covered by the \$2 million Community Based Violence Intervention & Prevention Initiative Grant received by the city in 2022.

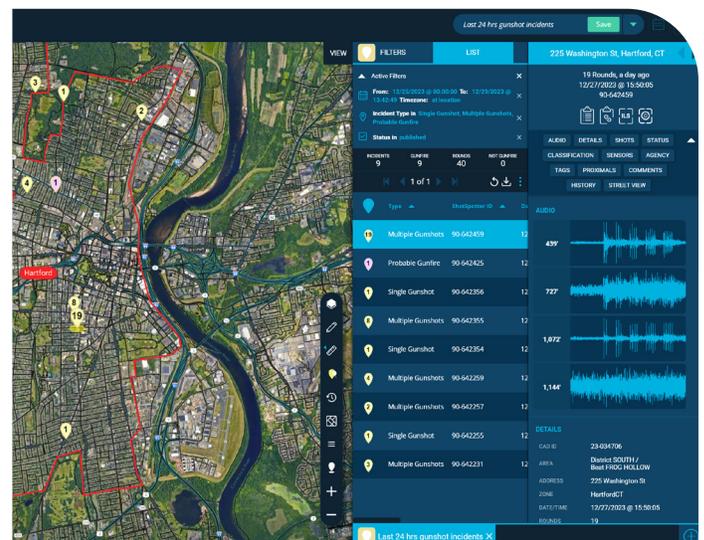
CITYWIDE CAMERA SYSTEM EXPANSION: Over the last eight years, the City has expanded its own camera network to cover every neighborhood in the city. The camera network has been a critical tool for solving gun violence cases that likely would have remained unsolved previously. A forthcoming analysis from the Police Department studied 419 shootings between 2019 and 2023 and found that when shooting cases have video relevant to the incident, there is a 123% increase in the proportion of cases solved, compared to those cases without video.



- **Funding:** Maintenance for the camera system varies year to year. The budget for 2023 was \$315,000 within the Department of Public Works budget. The Police Department expects that maintenance costs will decline as the City builds out its fiber network.

NEW CONNECTIONS WITH PRIVATE CAMERAS:

Modeled after a program in Atlanta, the Hartford Police Department now offers residents and business owners the opportunity to connect their own private cameras to the City system, growing the City’s network at little to no cost. In addition the City has distributed 70 free Ring cameras that are connected to the City’s network.



ONGOING INITIATIVES: PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

While effective law enforcement is critical to ensuring accountability, increasing deterrence, and removing individuals who consistently commit violent crime from the community, the city's response to gun violence goes far beyond law enforcement. The City has made major investments in prevention and community partnerships to complement the work of law enforcement, as part of a broader violence reduction strategy.

To advance that work, the City created an Office of Community Safety and Wellness under the Chief Operating Officer. That Office is part of the National Offices of Violence Prevention Network, a learning community that enhances the effectiveness of these kinds of government departments across the country.

One focus of the Office of Community Safety and Wellness is Hartford's population of returning citizens, because successful integration into the community is an important part of violence prevention in Hartford. According to the Police Department's analysis, the majority of gun violence victims and suspects were known to the criminal justice system before their involvement in violence.

REENTRY WELCOME CENTER: The City created its Reentry Welcome Center (RWC) in 2018 and operated it out of City Hall with Community Partners in Action, one of the state's leading reentry organizations. The goal was to connect returning citizens, particularly those completing sentences, to the services and support they need to build successful lives. Since then, it has worked with 1,000+ individuals and in partnership with a network of dozens of providers, offering case management and referrals to services that can help with basic needs, employment, education, and more. In 2022, the City announced a major expansion of the RWC, at a larger facility, and with additional funding to expand its services.

- **Funding:** The RWC has always been supported by multiple funding streams. Initially in 2018, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving provided a three-year, \$450,000 grant, with some staffing support funded by the City. It is currently funded by \$900,000 in American Rescue Plan funds, a \$375,000 Department of Justice grant, and ongoing funding from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. In 2023, the mayor proposed, and the City Council adopted, a resolution allocating cannabis tax revenue to support the RWC, along with the Neighborhood Ambassadors Program.

1,000+
INDIVIDUALS SERVED BY RWC



Three other initiatives of the Office of Community Safety and Wellness support violence prevention through intervention.

HOSPITAL-BASED VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAM

(HVIP): In 2022, Hartford launched and funded a comprehensive hospital-based violence intervention program, which aims to engage with survivors of violence right after an incident at the hospital. The City's HVIP is administered by Connecticut Children's Injury Prevention Center, in partnership with Trinity Health of New England and Hartford Hospital, together with local violence interrupters — making Hartford the only city in the state to have three hospitals participating in its HVIP. Collectively, these partners implement a trauma-informed approach to care, identify risk factors, and provide long-term case management for victims of gun violence.

- **Formalized Partnerships:** Grassroots organizations like Hartford Communities That Care (HCTC), Mothers United Against Violence (MUAV), and COMPASS Peacebuilders have long done violence reduction work in Hartford. For the first time through the HVIP, they each have a formal contract and budget of \$110,000 with Connecticut Children's, which administers the program. They're contracted to provide a specific set of wraparound services, with MUAV focused on grief counseling, HCTC focused on supporting adults, and COMPASS focused on supporting young people who are involved in violence.
- **Results:** Over the five-month period between April and August of 2023, the HVIP coordinated care for 116 victims of gun violence across the three hospitals. More than half were connected to services to help them heal from trauma, access basic needs, or other support.
- **Next Steps:** There are several efforts underway to strengthen the HVIP, including enhancing data sharing and adding partners to support young women and victims requiring ongoing wound care, and refining the process of providing immediate support for victims.
- **Funding:** The City has allocated \$2 million in American Rescue Plan funds to run the HVIP in 2022, 2023, and 2024. Sub-awards to grassroots organizations fund staff and provide administrative support. Funding for the hospitals goes towards hiring a full-time HVIP specialist and associated costs.

RAPID RESPONSE PROTOCOL: In 2018, Hartford's Chief Operating Officer established a coordinated crisis response plan for victims of gun violence who were under 25 years old. That plan brought together law enforcement, social services, state officials, and the school system, as appropriate, to identify each young person's immediate needs and to try and address systemic challenges that might affect their life going forward. That turned into the City's Rapid Response Protocol, which is led by the Department of Families, Youth, Children, and Recreation's Youth Services Bureau (YSB), with support from the Office of Community Safety and Wellness.

The program came about after repeated instances where one agency or community group would know about a young person in crisis, and at risk of being a victim or perpetrator of violence — but either did not or could not marshal broader resources to intervene.

Since being formalized, the program has responded to 237 incidents of violence involving a young person, and has begun following the 5-5-5 model: meeting the family within 5 hours of the incident bedside at the hospital, offering a home visit within 5 days of first contact, and following up within 5 weeks to ensure outstanding needs are being met. Those needs can include trauma-informed counseling and support, housing assistance, transportation, basic needs, or whatever else a family might need. Recently, these response efforts have been further refined to provide a more individualized response to youth victims of violence and their families, which may mean coordinating services and meeting with families sooner and more frequently than the 5-5-5-model.

- **Funding:** The operation of the Protocol is funded through staff salaries, largely from the General Fund.

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION INITIATIVE:

In 2022, Hartford successfully applied for \$2 million in funding through the Department of Justice’s Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative. Hartford applied for that funding because, while it had built multiple components of a successful community violence intervention (CVI) strategy, its approach could benefit from coordinated expansion and development. The programming funded by this grant is designed to work with repeat, violent offenders who were identified in an external analysis conducted for the Police Department. The City is supplementing the grant with American Rescue Plan dollars, and using this funding in a number of ways:

- To hire two intensive case managers at Community Partners in Action to meet daily with individuals at high risk of being involved in violence, helping them build life plans and meet their goals.
- To work with Capital Community College (CCC) and develop a curriculum that can train Hartford residents who were formerly justice involved to work as credible messengers and serve the role of a peer mentor to individuals at risk of being involved in violence, in partnership with Intensive Case Managers. Currently, eight Hartford residents who were formerly justice involved are participating in a 10-week training program at CCC. They will complete their training in February of 2024 and begin peer mentoring. Two additional 10-week training sessions for new peer mentors will be held later in 2024.

- To engage the Full Citizen’s Coalition, a statewide advocacy group that works on behalf of people who are incarcerated and people returning home, which is being subcontracted by CPA to support the credible messengers program.
- To defray the cost of Police Department staffing directly related to violence reduction.
- To similarly defray technology costs directly related to violence reduction, including ShotSpotter, communications platforms, and video technology.

COMPASS Peacebuilders is a key partner in Hartford’s CVI ecosystem, and grant funding through the Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative will directly and indirectly support their work. Over the last year, they’ve enrolled more than 263 Hartford youth in their programming, and conducted 3,049 individual school, court, and home visits.

The City has also consistently provided direct General Fund support for COMPASS, including \$300,000 in FY2023. Their programming is effective, with 62% exhibiting decreased levels of risk, 57% achieving gains towards employment, and 59% making gains toward building positive social relationships.



ADVOCACY & STATEWIDE REFORM INITIATIVES

Alongside developing and implementing evidence-based violence reduction strategies, the City has advocated for a range of policy changes that can have a material impact on the safety of neighborhoods in Hartford. Recent examples include:

NEW STATE LEGISLATION ON SERIOUS FIREARM OFFENSE & REPEAT

OFFENDERS: The Hartford Police Department’s analysis of gun violence between 2019 and 2021, including 63 gun-related homicides and 398 non-fatal shootings, found that suspects and victims were **highly likely** to have prior arrests. For suspects and victims between eighteen and twenty-four, forty-nine percent had committed at least two or three criminal offenses.

Overall, seventy percent of victims and suspects had prior arrests in Hartford — and the average number of prior arrests was 9.6. In 2022 alone, of the 44 individuals arrested for fatal or non-fatal shootings, 39% were on pre-trial release, 14% were on probation, and 5% were on parole.

In response to this troubling data, Mayor Bronin, the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, and the Chief State’s Attorney developed a legislative proposal to increase accountability for repeat offenders, supported by a broad coalition of community advocates. That advocacy effort resulted in the most significant, bipartisan gun safety legislation in recent history, enacted by the legislature and Governor Lamont in 2023. The legislation increased accountability and provided prosecutors with additional tools for addressing Repeat Serious Firearm Offenders responsible for violence in the community.

ADVOCATING TO PROTECT GHOST GUN REGULATIONS: In 2022, Hartford joined fifteen other cities to file an amicus brief opposing an injunction attempting to prevent the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives from regulating “ghost guns.” The federal court system is still hearing appeals to the ATF’s rule.

INCREASED
ACCOUNTABILITY
FOR REPEAT SERIOUS
FIREARM OFFENDERS



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RECOMMENDATIONS

Gun violence is the most painful, vexing challenge that Hartford and cities like it face. It is a uniquely American, entrenched problem with many external causes, deeply felt by the most vulnerable members of the community — many of whom are traumatized by cycles of violence.

The incoming administration should continue working on every possible front and pursue a holistic approach to gun violence reduction. Specific priorities include:

- **CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CVI MODEL:** Hartford has invested significant resources over the last several years into studying the nature of gun violence in Hartford. As the City strengthens its implementation of its CVI model, including the HVIP, it will need the incoming administration's support — in terms of prioritizing gun violence prevention work within government, seeking funding, and keeping local stakeholders engaged.
- **ADVOCATE FOR MORE EFFECTIVE TRAUMA TREATMENT INSIDE DOC FACILITIES AND IN COMMUNITY SETTINGS:** We know that those who are involved in gun violence in our community have often been exposed to violence, and in many cases have been victims of violence. Breaking the cycle of violence requires more effective treatment of trauma, through tools such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). It is vital that we provide more effective treatment to those who are incarcerated and especially to those young people who are becoming involved with the criminal justice system.
- **MAINTAIN TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENTS:** Hartford has invested millions of dollars and enormous time and energy into its anti-crime technology investments. Those investments, including the camera system, ShotSpotter, and other technology, as well as expertise within the Police Department, will require regular maintenance and prioritization.
- **CONTINUE TO ADVOCATE FOR LAWS THAT REDUCE ACCESS TO GUNS:** Hartford has seen a growing number of ghost guns, along with the proliferation of Glock switches and the steady flow of out-of-state guns. Access to illegally possessed firearms continues to be a major factor in the rate of gun violence. The incoming administration should continue Hartford's longtime advocacy against the proliferation of illegal guns.